Anna Rauvenpoor

Professor Mary Joan Connelly

LIS 532

November 26, 2012

Report to Middle School Principal

**Introduction**

Recent budget cuts that resulted in the reduction of library staff to one full-time certified library media specialist have disrupted service in the library media center. The loss of one full-time clerk and one full-time instructional technology resource teacher has slowed the daily functions of the LMC and, in some areas halted service altogether. The 660 students, 62 teachers / staff, and administration of our school have grown accustomed to a level of service that cannot be maintained within the current structure of the library media program. Therefore, a proposed restructuring of the current LMP that reflects a vision of a vibrant media center and library program that both meets and exceeds the standards of our school, district, and community is contained within this report.

**Services in Peril**

The flexible schedule of the LMC has always allowed open access throughout the day for those patrons requiring assistance. Without staff to run the circulation desk, field reference and technical questions, oversee study halls, and answer phones open access will no longer be possible during times of library instruction. The collaborative relationships developed and strengthened over the years between the library and the teaching staff ensures a full instructional schedule for the library media specialist. The SLMS’ instructional calendar contains the library curriculum, collaborative projects with classroom teachers, technology workshops, and professional development opportunities. While this full instructional schedule has always been an indicator of the value inherent in the LMP, with the loss of all support staff it also forces the end of open access to the services and materials of the LMC. The loss of open access to the LMC will greatly affect many students, teachers, and staff no longer able to use the LMC as a study hall, break room, meeting space, planning area, and last minute resource center. It is clear that losing open access of the LMC is not a viable solution. However, a commitment to the educational goals and values of the district and school do not allow for a reduction of instruction and collaboration in the LMP as a viable solution either.

**Solution**

The restructuring plan envisioned for the LMP that will create a program meeting and exceeding levels of service previously expected is based on implementing a culture of participation throughout the library program. A participatory culture in the library will create a space where students have a voice in the process that is their education and where teachers and staff collaborate across disciplines to enable 21st century learning. In Henry Jenkins’ work *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*, he defines participatory culture as having “relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing with others, and informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. Members believe their contributions matter and have some degree of social connection with one another” (Jenkins 2006, 7).

Embedding the principles of participatory culture within the library and its programs strives to increase the level of engagement from all groups of stakeholders. In doing so, a library program can be created that will continue to expand and spread its influence beyond the walls of the LMC. Creating a culture of participation is not an overnight project, it’s more akin to a lifestyle change. Its creation will require both diligence and commitment from all groups to a type of rich collaboration that will serve as the foundation for a sustainable library program. The collaborative relationships already in place between the library and some teachers will serve as a starting point for outreach into more active participation in library events and programs.

**Reevaluation**

Implementing a culture change first requires a thorough reevaluation of the LMC, its programs and functions, and an investigation of how those elements align with the school and district’s core values. Only then can a prioritization of tasks be outlined that will allow for the restructuring of the library program by determining what tasks can be reassigned or eliminated. By streamlining the functions and programs of the LMC, new opportunities are created for growth and change in unexpected areas.

Following the model former school librarian Kristin Fontichiaro used when restructuring her media center in MI after budget cuts reduced support staff, a set of goals and key questions guide the restructuring process. The following goals align with both the district and school’s core educational values and are the top priorities in considering the restructuring of the LMP:

1. Maintain the integrity of the library media curriculum.
2. Maintain the SLMS’ role as teacher, collaborator, and technology leader.
3. Minimize any negative impact on teachers and students.
4. Prioritize tasks and functions that directly impact teaching and learning and those that require technical expertise.
5. Reassign non-essential tasks to other departments and staff.

Determining what tasks should be kept, reshaped, or eliminated uses the above outlined goals in conjunction with some basic key questions to guide the process. Those key questions are as follows:

1. What are the tasks that only the SLMS can perform?
2. Which tasks could potentially be performed by other staff?
3. Which tasks could be eliminated?

**Reevaluation Results**

A reevaluation of the tasks and functions of the LMC resulted in the following divisions of control:

SLMS

* Collection maintenance (although certain aspects can be delegated to properly trained individuals).
* Library orientation
* LMC and instructional scheduling
* Library curriculum instruction
* Collaborative teaching and learning
* Technology leader and consultant
* Website maintenance for the LMC and LMP
* Professional development workshops

Delegated

* Circulation desk duties
* A/V equipment delivery
* Answering LMC telephone calls
* Shelving
* New material processing
* Teacher website maintenance
* Study hall monitor
* Test proctoring

Eliminated

* “Holding tank” for students with behavior problems

After reevaluating the functions and programs of the LMC, it became clear that although many of the tasks could be delegated elsewhere, there did not exist a large enough pool of potential delegates to oversee the tasks. The overall maintenance and outward components of the LMC such as housekeeping, reshelving, processing of new materials, checkout duties, answering phones, and fielding standard reference questions need to be accomplished by a support staff so the SLMS can attend to the essential instructional components of the program. In the absence of a support staff or available staff in the building with enough available hours to take on the tasks at hand, a creative solution must be reached.

**iStaff**

Learning objectives can be combined with staffing needs to achieve a creative solution that secures student involvement in the LMC at a level far beyond what we’ve previously imagined. Recipient of the *Teacher Librarian* Visionary Leader award in 2011, Sue Kowalski developed a model of student staffing in the LMC she calls iStaff. The iStaff model employs students who work shifts in the LMC during their study hall, lunch, or activity times. This innovative initiative embodies the spirit of participatory culture. According to Kowalski, “the main goal is to empower students to use initiative and leadership to integrate their talent areas (technology, literature, public relations) into all aspects of the school library program. Students help manage the facility, offer input on collection development, deliver mobile technology, provide feedback on grant applications and support instruction” (Kowalski 2012, 33).

Student benefits to participation in the iStaff initiative are plentiful and diverse. Students gain invaluable library skills that go beyond the library curriculum and the confidence to teach them to others. They learn what it means to handle job responsibilities that affect the entire organization and therefore, learn to see their role in contributing to community and in successful business-customer relationships. Students are given the opportunity to secure a peer group with like interests and to develop meaningful relationships in a safe and nurturing environment.

Likewise, the LMC and school community benefit from the iStaff model. Students become spokespersons and participants in library programs and events who recruit and influence other students to participate and advocate for the library. With students at the helm of the outward components of the LMC, the SLMS is free to attend to the instructional components of the LMP. The opportunities for growth of the library will increase exponentially with the numbers of students, staff, and parents actively engaging in a culture of participation. A multipurpose learning commons should be the goal where leadership and shared commitments are at the foundation of a sustainable library program.

Start-up of the iStaff initiative should be marketed to the student body as a whole via the morning announcements and flyers posted in classrooms and outside the LMC. Students can visit the LMC to fill out an application for a position on the start-up team. The initial team should be limited to 10-15 students who are a good match for the learning curve and commitment that will be required of the pioneer group. Training sessions should take place over the course of a few weekend days and should focus on modules of training such as Dewey Decimal system, electronic databases, reference, and circulation desk. After outside training, students can be inserted in to the LMC schedule for inside training periods under the supervision of the SLMS. A schedule that allows the iStaff to perform the circulation and other outward components of the LMC during instructional time for the SLMS is the initial goal.

**Conclusion**

While the strategies outlined in this report are not meant to be final solutions to the problems we face in these times of budget crises, they are meant to provide a shared vision of a vibrant library media program. The heart of such a program must lay in a culture of participation both in the library and throughout the school. We are lucky to be positioned in a community that is supportive of educational goals and involved in the processes and functions of the district schools. The parents and families of our students are supportive and we should use that inclination to call for greater participation in library initiatives such as iStaff and other library programs and events that reach out to the community beyond the school.

Partnering with the local public and university libraries could provide further opportunities for iStaff training. Libraries are natural venues for collaboration and the excellent libraries in our area are a potential source of collaborative opportunity that could inspire and enhance student learning. The Department of Library and Information Studies in the Graduate School of Education at the University at Buffalo is a potential partner whose students might find an opportunity to train our iStaff a rewarding learning experience. We should also consider pursuing potential partnerships with special libraries like those found within the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the Burchfield Penney Art Center for the unique resources and insights they might provide to our school and our students.

The economic climate at the district and school level is a reflection of the community as a whole. The members of our community understand the economic hardships we face in providing the very best educational services to our students. These times present an opportunity to address the need for a change in our schools from that of consumer culture to one of participatory culture. The members of our community are hard-working and educated individuals who are likely to embrace a call for change that doesn’t require a monetary investment but instead relies on interaction between members to facilitate growth. We are positioned in a community rich with human resources, let’s take advantage of it!

WORKS CITED

Edwards, Buffy. "Can-Do Spirit." *Knowledge Quest* 40.3 (2012): 54-57. Print.

The author, a school library media specialist at Norman Public Schools in OK and adjunct professor at the School of Library and Information Studies discusses the importance of media specialist focus and determination in times of budget crises. She recommends that school librarians first depersonalize the situation, thereby removing personal anger. A refocusing on student learning will then allow a solo librarian to move forward in restructuring the best possible library media program. The author asserts that “attitude is everything” and being realistic about limited human resources will help in prioritizing or eliminating certain library functions. She outlines a number of effective and inexpensive ideas that can help with library functions and support student learning.

Specific examples such as creating electronic bookshelves for grade levels, genres, student groups, and reading groups are useful solutions for today’s solo librarian. The information and ideas the author presents in this article offer easy solutions for supporting daily library functions as well as creating a network of human resources and advocates for supporting school libraries.

Jenkins, Henry. *Confronting the Challenges of Paritcipatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Chicago: MacArthur Foundation, 2006. Print.

Kowalski, Sue. "Raising the Bar." *Knowledge Quest* 41.1 (2012): 28-36. Print.

The author, an innovative middle school librarian in Syracuse, NY is the current president-elect of NYLA-SSL and was recently named a Visionary Leader by *Teacher Librarian*. In this article, she discusses the nature of participatory culture in a library media program run by students, staff, and an entire school community. Active partnerships between these groups and the school library program enable her library to be a multipurpose learning commons that also delivers exceptional service to every patron. The author’s focus is on the level of participation students, staff, and the school community engage in with the school library program. She offers directions in the outreach process that is critical to a successful culture of participation. Specific opportunities for engaging students at various levels of the library program are discussed. The author outlines a program developed and implemented by her LMC known as iStaff which employs students to work library shifts during their study halls, lunches, or activity times. The students help manage the facility, offer input on collection development, deliver mobile technology, support instruction, and offer technical support.

The ideas presented in this article expand upon those presented in author Nancy Terrell’s article regarding what is possible when collaborative relationships are formed between the LMC and the school community. The expansion possibilities that exist in a school library program with a participatory culture may offer some solutions to an understaffed LMC.

Terrell, Nancy. "A Quality School Library Program." *Knowledge Quest* 40.2 (2011): 18-23. Print.

The author, a seasoned middle school teacher-librarian in VA discusses the importance of developing and maintaining a positive attitude in the face of school budget cuts. She encourages school library media specialists to embrace changes, such as staffing cuts, as opportunities to grow both the library program and to grow as a professional. Through the delegation of tasks to a variety of human resources that include students, school staff, and parents she asserts that many aspects of the library program can be saved and continue to flourish. The author stresses the importance of preparedness and pre-planning wherever possible in conjunction with streamlining and organizing procedures and materials in achieving a successful solo-librarian run library media program.

The suggestions the author provides for organizing and streamlining instructional programs such as student library orientation are relevant and would be easy to install without special provisions in most school libraries. Specific examples of collaborative opportunities that increase the ability of the library media specialist to reach more students instructionally while still maintaining the basic circulation services of the LMC provide real solutions to common problems solo librarians face today.

PRACTITIONER

Anderson, Mary Alice. "What Happens When Media Positions Are Cut?" *Library Media Connection* 29.6 (2011): 16-18. Print.

The author, a former Minnesota middle school library media specialist and current teacher in the online Professional Development Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout discusses the impact of budget cuts on the management of school library media centers. The author relays personal stories and those of other professionals in the field to paint a picture of the media center in crisis. She asserts that the result of cutting media positions is severely reduced instruction in the library. She points out that this results in a further downward spiral when teachers cannot step in and teach the necessary skills for research projects that simply go unassigned. The author argues that this is not only detrimental to the students and the curriculum, but also to the fate of the profession of school library media specialist. She states that a school which no longer teaches a curriculum that includes library skills may have no need for a certified teacher-librarian. The author also outlines the mismanagement and underutilization of materials in the collection without a SLMS at the helm to guide effective use and management of the collection.

The information provided by the author in this article presents a grim picture for school library media programs and the schools they serve when media positions are subtracted from the budget. The author’s point of view strengthens the arguments for keeping full-time certified teacher-librarians in school library media centers.

Dutton, Ann. "Surviving the Recession: Fostering Environments That Support School Librarians." *School Library Journal* 27.3 (2010): 54-56. Print.

The author, an education subject librarian at Arizona State University in Phoenix and teacher in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University examines the strategies of one school district determined to maintain school libraries despite the recession. She interviews a school board member, the district superintendent, the district director of finance, an assistant principal, and a librarian in an effort to determine what factors were considered in the decision to retain the school library media positions within the district.

The key factors discussed by the author include: actively engaging in the school budgeting process through transparent programming and communication, developing key relationships between SLMS and principals, commiting to the school’s and district’s core values, and increasing the value of the school library program. The author urges SLMS to advocate for their jobs and their programs through creative communications that demonstrate the value of the five roles of the school librarian: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, program manager, and leader. This article supplies SLMS with a guide for what factors to keep in consideration at all times when implementing a school library program.

Fontichiaro, Kristin. "Staffing Has Been Cut...Now What Do You Do?" *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 24.8 (2008): 28-30. Print.

The author, a clinical assistant professor at the University of Michigan, blogger for *School Library Monthly* and editor of *21st-Century Learning in School Libraries* (Libraries Unlimited, 2009) outlines steps media specialists should take when support staff is cut and extra duties are assigned to the librarian. She encourages media specialists to take the lead in creating a vision for a restructured library media center before administrators do it for them. The author details the goals in restructuring that should be focused upon such as maintaining the integrity of the library media curriculum and the SLMS’ role as teacher, collaborator, and technology leader. She then offers a strategy for establishing a process that will help determine what aspects of the library program can be absorbed by others or eliminated all together.

Specific examples such as increasing the font size on the spine labels to allow for faster and easier reshelving offer librarians real solutions for time saving in an understaffed LMC. Other helpful strategies include ways to help teachers transition to an LMC with limited staff and how the school community can work together to maximize the time and the resources that are available.

Rebecca T. Miller, Laura Girmscheid. "It Takes Two" *School Library Journal* 58.5.May 2012 (2012): 26-29. Print.

The authors, *School Library Journal’s* editor-in-chief and the magazine’s research manager discuss the opportunity to foster a stronger relationship between public and school libraries that can better support the needs of children. A survey by *School Library Journal* of public library spending habits revealed that only 30 percent of respondents say their library collaborates with local schools to coordinate book purchases to support the curriculum. The survey further revealed that a mere 9 percent of public libraries surveyed work directly with school librarians and teachers to purchase materials that help with homework assignments. The authors advocate for strategic collaboration among school and public librarians in an effort to help fill the gaps created by budget cuts.

Data about how public libraries spend their budgets on children and young adults as well as what they do to attract these groups to the library offer the reader a glimpse into what is possible through collaborative public and school library relationships. Specific examples such as ILL, public library card drives, workshops on using the public library’s remote access collections of ebooks, and homework help are a few ideas mentioned by the authors.

ONLINE

Bonanno, Karen. "School Library Advocacy". 2012. scoop.it! <http://www.scoop.it/t/school-library-advocacy>.

Scoop.it! at <http://www.scoop.it/> is a social media and curation publishing platform. Scoop.it! enables users to search by topics being curated as opposed to by the people doing the curating (like Facebook). This allows for more pinpointed and relevant results for the user. Typing keywords in the Search box will bring up a list of relevant topics being curated. Many professionals in the field of librarianship are using this tool to curate on their specialty areas. Some of the most relevant curations for this project are listed below.

School Librarians <http://www.scoop.it/t/school-librarians>

Libraries as Sites of Enchantment, Paricipatory Culture, and Learning <http://www.scoop.it/t/libraries-as-sites-of-enchantment-participatory-culture-and-learning>

LibraryHints2012 <http://www.scoop.it/t/handmade-new-zealand>

"Tl Virtual Cafe". <http://tlvirtualcafe.wikispaces.com/>.

Teacher Librarian Virtual Café is a wiki hosted by Wikispaces, a Tangient LLC venture. The TL Virtual Café is focused on creating conversations about the profession of teacher librarianship, technology in education, and the ways in which collaboration can facilitate lifelong learning skills. The wiki is coordinated by DC Metro middle school teacher librarian Gwyneth Jones (blog at <http://www.thedaringlibrarian.com/> ) and NC middle school teacher librarian Jennifer LaGarde (blog at <http://www.librarygirl.net/> . TL Virtual Café utilizes Blackboard Collaborate to enable chat conversations during the free webinars offered in the wiki. Wiki contents are up-to-date and offer valuable information on a variety of topics pertaining to education in the school library.

AASL. "Essential Links: Resources for School Library Program Development". <http://aasl.ala.org/essentiallinks/index.php?title=Main\_Page>.

Essential Links is a wiki that contains a working bibliography of resources for school librarians and other professionals in the fields of librarianship and education. Information about the tools that librarians need to perform their jobs to the best of their ability can be found arranged alphabetically by topic. Essential Links is meant to be used as a tool that keeps professionals up-to-date with the very latest in the field. Contribution to the wiki is encouraged but requires the user to first create an account. Search and view features are available to any user.